

Dear Judge Patrick Schilly,

My name is Stephen Shepherd III. I am 33 years old and I have been fighting drug addiction since the age of 19. I started using cocaine after a close friend of mine was killed. I dropped out of college and eventually was homeless and living on the streets. By the time I was 21 years old, I was addicted to crack-cocaine.

At the age of 22, I was arrested for the first time for drug possession. At this point in my life, I was sleeping in my car, so I kept a gun for protection which led to my first incarceration at age 24. I was released from prison, work a job, take care of my family, relapse and go back to prison. That cycle has amounted to me going to prison 3 times and this will be my fourth. Although I failed again, I have hope and confidence in myself based on what I was able to accomplish after my most recent release from prison. I stayed sober for 12 months before relapse, which is the longest that I have been sober since the age of 19. I went from working at Dayton Rodgers Manufacturing to managing my own business. I rented an apartment and spent my time being a dad to my children. I got engaged to my son's mother. Unfortunately, circumstances changed for the worse. I lost my business, lost my apartment and was losing friends to violence. I relapsed again and 4 months later, I was facing prison again.

I am disappointed and embarrassed of my choices. I have continuously failed myself, my family and my community. At the age of 33, I have a different

on how every decision I make can effect my life. This time that I am facing is an opportunity and I am grateful that I have this opportunity to become who I aspire to be. Currently, I am 11 months sober. This is my first time not using drugs in prison. For the first time, I have been taking advantage of the programs and resources available to me and im looking forward to the resources that will be available to me. I have created a plan to help me stay on track after release. I set specific goals that align with my definition of success. I've committed myself 100% to become better in spite of the situation that I am in. Everyday, I visualize the life I want to live and those thoughts influence the choices I make and the way I spend my time. Every step I take is related to improvement regardless of whether it is a book I am reading, the classes I take or the people I associate with. Every move I make matters, I am taking nothing light. I am determined to overcome my weaknesses and this time is helping me accomplish that. Thank you for reading my letter.

Sincerely, Stephen